

and fennel are very similar in that they tend to grow in fields and not particularly in marshy areas. It would be more likely, therefore, that *Conium maculatum* would be ingested mistakenly than the *Cicuta* species. Further investigation reveals that *Cicuta maculata* which was apparently identified as the ingested plant does not even grow in California, its range being limited to the eastern United States, Canada, Missouri and west as far as Texas. The species of *Cicuta* that grow in California are *Cicuta California* and *Cicuta douglasii* and in a small area around Suisun Bay, a third species, *Cicuta voanderli*. None of these could conceivably be mistaken for *Conium maculatum*.

It is possible that the text is all correct and that there was merely a substitution of an incorrect photograph, however, my feeling is that the poisoning was mis-diagnosed as water hemlock poisoning when, in fact, it was poisoning by Poison Hemlock, *Conium maculatum*.

This becomes important in that the toxic components of the *Cicuta* is a resinoid while the toxic component of *Conium* is an alkaloid. Circular 530 from California Agricultural Extension Service reviews extensively the identification and control of poisonous hemlocks in California.

THOMAS O. SCHMIDA, MD
Santa Cruz

REFERENCES

1. Kingsbury JM: Poisonous Plants of the United States and Canada. Prentice Hall, 1964, pp 373-383
2. Tucker JM, Fowler ME, Harvey WA, et al: Poisonous hemlocks, their identification and control. California Agricultural Circular No. 530

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The Author Replies

In an attempt to obtain a clear photograph of the plant water hemlock, I asked a friend who is a ranger at Point Reyes National Seashore to photograph the plant for me. This was the photograph that I submitted. Unfortunately, although we discussed water hemlock, he photographed *conium maculata*, poison hemlock. Not being a botanist I did not recognize this problem at the time. I still have photographs of the original tubers which Dr. Constance helped us identify. These are water hemlock.

[As to the toxicology report] specifically, we asked for identification of water hemlock but a test for conine was serendipitously performed . . . Conine was not present in the gastric contents. We specifically identified the plant as *cicuta virosa* not *cicuta maculata*. However, in our discussion

on page 81 while attempting to show that the poisonings of *cicuta virosa* are like that of *cicuta maculata* and *cicuta vagans* we parenthesized the latter two. Hence, it may appear that we were equating these three but in reality we were trying to show their similarities.

I have reverified with Dr. Constance, Professor of Botany at University of California-Berkeley, that the plant these boys ate was indeed water hemlock of the *cicuta* species. He informs me that *cicuta virosa* is the old world term and this species may now be known locally as *cicuta douglasii*. He stated that I might quote him as to the truth that water hemlock grows abundantly in California in marshy areas. The National Park Services' botanist at Point Reyes National Seashore also verifies that water hemlock is abundant here and there are several species in this area.

Let your readers be assured that the poisoning in question and the effects described were due to water hemlock or *cicuta* species toxicity. This plant grows abundantly in California.

As suggested by Dr. Schmida the photograph was in error. The poisoning, however, was not. Specifically we feel that all physicians in this state should be aware of this poisoning and also this plant which grows in abundance in California.

DAVID J. COSTANZA, MD
San Francisco

Acupuncture and the Law

TO THE EDITOR: I have just learned of the efforts of a law firm in San Francisco to contact many of the physicians in this state to enlist their support in a suit against the Board of Medical Examiners and the Attorney General of the State of California, seeking a court decision to allow the use of non-MD acupuncturists. While I do not question the motives of these attorneys or their clients, the cover letter and the "Draft Complaint" which are being circulated raise some questions which I think must be carefully considered by both plaintiffs and defendants, as well as those who are so far uncommitted or uninvolved. The answers to these questions have major implications for the practice of medicine and the utilization of acupuncture in the United States.

The essence of the argument appears to be that acupuncture, as a new and unfamiliar arrival on